

Get your motor running right

As the heat of the summer fades into the chilling reality that fall and winter are coming, it should remind homeowners of the need to prepare their houses for cooler weather. If you are one of the lucky ones that migrate to a warmer climate during the winter months, then you have permission to stop reading. If you have the privilege of enduring 5 months of salt, snow, ice, and potholes-you may want to keep reading.

Regardless of the type of heating system used, proper care and maintenance helps the unit perform better and safer. Like anything with moving parts, natural gas or propane fired units need to be cared for to maximize their life span.

First, make sure the filter is in place and is clean. It is recommended that you change your filter at least every season. Also, in the theme of “you get what you pay for”, don’t buy a \$.99 filter and expect good results. These filters, which are typically blue fiberglass, do not stop the finest particles from entering the blower area of the furnace. In a high efficiency unit with 2 heat exchangers, this dust will get sucked up into the second heat exchanger and prematurely damage the unit. You can buy a good quality filter for \$10-15. They are usually gray and have reinforcing metal in them. It is worth the purchase.

Second, start your unit up before you will need it. The furnace should respond to the thermostat and come on in a timely manner. If not, it needs to be serviced. Before you call anyone, be sure that the emergency shut-off switch is turned on next to the unit. Once it starts, check the burner flames. They should be straight (not flickering or wavy), and blue. If your flame is orange and yellow, you have incomplete combustion and the unit needs to be serviced.

Third, listen for any unusual squeaks or rattles. For those fortunate to have a spouse with sonar hearing, a small squeak can create major problems. They may be a sign of a mechanical item about ready to fail. If you have any doubts that your unit is functioning properly, call a qualified heating/cooling company to get it checked out.

If you solid fuel burning appliances be sure your heat flue or chimney is cleaned out and doesn’t have a buildup of creosote or other flammable materials. Use high quality hardwoods in fireplaces instead of softer woods such as pine. The fuel will burn longer and will not produce as much “junk” for your chimney.

Finally, be sure that the doors and screens in front of the fireplaces or functioning and keep all sparks inside the firebox and not on the carpet or hardwood floor.